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Church Shows Signs He Will Relish F

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By RICHARD BURT

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WASHINGTON, April 18—Although he will not assume the chairmanship of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for another eight months, Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, is already grooming himself for the job.

Along with his committee colleague, Paul S. Sarbanes, Democrat of Maryland, Mr. Church spent much of the spring on the Senate floor, managing the effort to win approval for the Panama Canal treaties.

Long an active and outspoken participant in Congressional foreign policy debates, Mr. Church seemed to lose much of his interest in international problems following his brief, hectic bid for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1976. "The campaign drained him, both physically and emotionally," said an aide.

But with Senator John J. Sparkman, Democrat of Alabama, preparing to step down as leader of the Foreign Relations Committee when he retires in January, Mr. Church has regained much of his old form, taking the lead on a range on a range of controversial issues.

Opposes Carter on Some Issues

On some, such as Panama, he has emerged as a strong ally of the Carter Administration. But he has also become a leading critic of the White House's plan to sell advanced warplanes to Saudi Arabia and is also expected to oppose President Carter's attempt this spring to lift a Congressionally imposed embargo on arms to Turkey.

All this activity has not escaped notice on Capitol Hill, where colleagues are asking whether Mr. Church, with his strong views and his strong sense of publicity, will be able to restore the Foreign Relations Committee to the position of influence it enjoyed a few years ago. Under the tight rein of Senator J. William Fulbright, the committee, from 1959 to 1975, functioned as the loudest though not always the most effective voice in Congress on foreign policy. During the late 1960's it was the main opponent on Capitol Hill of the Johnson Administration's deepening involvement in the Vietnam War. During the Nixon years it maintained its influence by becoming an important ally of the White House on such crucial issues as Soviet-American detente and policies on the Middle East.

There is general agreement that under Senator Sparkman the committee's influence has declined. In part this is said to have resulted from the Alabamian's failure to exercise strong central control; the committee's problems also stem from the unwillingness of junior members to accept strong leadership.

Criticized U.S. Role in Vietnam

There is little doubt on Capitol Hill that when Mr. Church becomes chairman next year, he will try, as he said recently in an interview, "to pull the committee together." But committee members and staff are uncertain whether he will succeed. While almost universally acclaimed as an intelligent, probing legislator, he is also described as a loner, a sometimes arrogant individual whose highly personal views on foreign policy may not sit well with the committee or the Senate. In addition, many senators and aides doubt whether the fragmentation of the Sparkman period can be easily reversed. Mr. Church, who at the age of 32 came

to the Senate in 1957 as its youngest member, emerged as a significant voice on the Foreign Relations Committee in the late 60's when he allied himself with Mr. Fulbright in criticizing the involvement in Vietnam. Opposing what he called "the problem of the growing power of the Presidency," he was a co-author of the amendment that restricted the expansion of the war effort into Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

Senator Church took the lead in legislating the cessation of American bombing in Indochina and was a strong backer of bills to curb Presidential war powers. In the committee he used the newly created subcommittee on multinational corporations in 1973 to investigate the role of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation in efforts of the Central Intelligence Agency to "destabilize" the Marxist Government of Dr. Salvador Allende Gossens in Chile; later he investigated the use of bribes and payoffs by American corporations to foreign politicians.

In 1975 he became chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which, for 16 months, investigated the C.I.A. and other agencies and called for a reorganization of the intelligence establishment to bring it under greater control of the White House and Congress.

What the Constitution Meant

Though his record has won him good marks on Capitol Hill, where he is seen to be an effective legislator as well as a persuasive proponent of his beliefs, even his strongest supporters acknowledge that he is something of an enigma, a man who seems to stand aloof from the chummy ways of the Senate. Some of his colleagues and staff contend that he is too impressed with his debating skills and analytical talents; as a former aide put it, "Frank is more interested in phrases and publicity than the real substance of foreign affairs." Others maintain that his views on foreign policy were formed in the heat of debate in the 60's and are not well-suited to the post-Vietnam era.

Sipping a root beer and savoring a

Cuban cigar the other day at his office in the Capitol, the Senator emphasized the role of Congress in foreign policy and, in particular, the function of the Foreign Relations Committee. "I want the committee to fulfill the role that the Constitution mean it should play in the Senate," he said.

While a portrait of a former committee chairman and fellow Idahoan, William E. Borah, occupied a prominent place in his office, Senator Church scoffs at the idea that he and the 1920's isolationist share the same world view. "That's an Eastern Seaboard Establishment charge," he said with a laugh. "Why, in Idaho the John Birch Society is after me for being a fuzzy-headed internationalist."

Mr. Church does express serious doubts about American involvement abroad. "When I grew up," he said, "nothing in the world was our business. This view undoubtedly helped lead to World War II. But during my lifetime I've seen the pendulum swing to the point where the prevailing view is that anything that happens in the world is our business."

Will Not Crush Subcommittees

Accordingly, he says he is skeptical, in many instances, of foreign aid, and he supports the Administration's plan for reducing ground forces in South Korea. In the early 70's he also supported efforts to pull back American forces in Western Europe, but he says he would not support such a move at present "because of the substantial buildup of Soviet forces in Eastern Europe."

The Foreign Relations Committee will "act as a whole on all major pieces of legislation" under his leadership, Senator Church stressed. Acknowledging that his own committee on foreign economic operations, as well as the panel on foreign aid formed two years ago, had weakened the full committee because they were given the power to draft bills, he promised that subcommittees would not return to being the "mere appendages" they were under Senator Fulbright. He said that younger members of the committee, such as Senator Dick Clark of Iowa and Senator John Glenn of Ohio, both Democrats, had developed special knowledge that could be used in subcommittee work.

"But the main decisions," he added, "will be dealt with by the full committee."

Recognizing this, some committee aides predict that Senator Church's transition to the chairmanship may not be a smooth one. Few believe that the junior members of the panel would easily give up the prerogatives they have won under Senator Sparkman's loose leadership.

Senator Church's future relations with the White House seem equally uncertain. Although he has led the Panama Canal struggle and plans to be a major proponent of a new strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union, he says he will not be an "agent" of the White House. There appear to be several areas—Middle East policy, arms sales, troop deployments abroad—where he and Mr. Carter seem destined to clash.

Committee aides believe that if the White House takes the trouble to build up close ties with Senator Church, this might be avoided. So far, they report, this has not happened. Mr. Carter is said to be on good terms with the future chairman, but the President's key political aides are still said to remember Senator Church's last-minute attempt two years ago to take the Democratic nomination.

"If the White House doesn't soon recognize the importance of keeping on the good side of Frank Church, then it will be their mistake," commented a committee aide. "For with the troubles the President is having in Capitol Hill, the more than Frank Church needs the White House."

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